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CJCS FOR ADMIRAL MULLEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR OVIP ES
SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO EL SALVADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) I'm delighted that you'll be visiting El Salvador. Your visit comes in a string of recent high-level visits, and your presence here will underline the importance of El Salvador's contribution to coalition efforts in Iraq. Also, it will offer a boost to our efforts to address the nation,s most pressing problem: a public security crisis that has spiraled out of control. The Salvadorans will press you for concrete signs of US appreciation for their presence in Iraq and will urge you to help address aging equipment issues. The Minister of Defense may request help in supporting long-term medical needs for OIF wounded. We should support GOES requests that reinforce our shared War on Terrorism, counter-drug, counter-trafficking and public security goals

Political/Economic Overview and Migration Issues

¶2. (C) President Elias Antonio "Tony" Saca of the governing ARENA party assumed office June 1, 2004 after winning a strongly-contested presidential race with 57.7 percent of votes cast. President Saca's center-right ARENA party holds 34 of 84 seats in the Legislative Assembly, but aligns with smaller parties to form a working majority on important issues. The leftist FMLN holds 32 seats. Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections will be held in early ¶2009. The campaign is off to an early start since the FMLN nominated its candidate in October. This may result in the ARENA party nominating a candidate earlier than planned. President Saca has made the reinvigoration of El Salvador's economy, the creation of jobs, and improvements in the nation's infrastructure his highest priorities; however, staggering rates of violent crime deflect attention

from his economic priorities. The public security crisis could have a major negative impact on 2009 presidential and legislative elections. We are working closely with the GOES to address this crisis, both by providing resources where we can and by advising the Government on police, legal and criminal procedure reforms.

¶3. (SBU) After six years of growth that never exceeded 2.8 percent annually, Salvadoran GDP grew by 4.2 percent in 2006 and 4.7 percent in 2007. El Salvador was the first nation to sign and implement CAFTA-DR; early results are encouraging. Some twenty-five percent of Salvadorans live in the United States, many illegally. Since the 2001 earthquakes, between 250,000 and 280,000 Salvadorans have benefited from Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and have been able to live and work legally in the United States. Remittances from Salvadorans living abroad provide an important source of income for their families in El Salvador. In 2006, remittances amounted to $3.3 billion, approximately 18% of GDP. Public opinion polls also show that 7 out of 10 Salvadorans would immigrate to the United States if given the chance. The U.S. debate over immigration reform is followed very closely here.

Civilian-Military Relations

¶4. (C) The Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) are capable, professional, and subordinate to civilian authority. The military consistently receives high approval ratings in public opinion polls, due largely to its response to national emergencies, including earthquakes, hurricanes, and outbreaks of infectious diseases such as Dengue. Salvadoran soldiers also support police in counternarcotics efforts, anti-gang patrols, rural patrols, customs inspections, and reform-school training for juvenile convicts. On 21 December the Minister of Defense (Retired General Romero) and Vice Minister of Defense (Retired General Abrego) were replaced. The former Chief of the Joint Staff, General Molina, has become the new MOD, and the Commander of the Navy, Admiral Palacios, as the new Vice-MOD. The new Joint Chief of Staff General Mendoza was previously the Army Chief of Staff, and General Moreno, who formerly was the Inspector General of the El Salvadoran Armed Forces is now serving as the Vice Chief of the Joint Staff, a position vacant for the past year and a half.

¶5. (C) The ESAF continues to focus on force modernization in a constrained budget environment. The ESAF currently has approximately 12,000 total service members and 2,500 administrative personnel. The ESAF's funding level of USD 115 million has changed very little for several years, representing a slightly declining percentage

of the
national budget. Small increases for the ESAF in recent
yearly budgets
have been obligated to a pay raise, so there is no net
increase in
funds available for operations, training, maintenance, and
modernization.
While El Salvador currently receives modest FMF allocations,
(2nd highest
in AOR most years and one of only two allocations in FY08),
military
officials have expressed their desire for considerable
increases to help
address pressing modernization needs. The focus of our FMF
expenditures is
on developing host nation capabilities in disaster relief,
peacekeeping,
counterterrorism, and illicit trafficking.

OIF Service

¶6. (U) Since August 2003, the GOES has deployed over 3200
troops to
Iraq. The first two contingents consisted of 360 troops
while the 3rd
through 8th consisted of 380. The 1st and 2nd contingents
were
primarily charged with security and stability operations; and
it was
during the 2004 Al Najaf uprising that the first Salvadoran
soldier was
killed in combat. The 3rd-8th contingents conducted security,
humanitarian, and reconstruction efforts while the 9th
contingent,
which deployed in August 2007 with 280 troops, is primarily
conducting
HA&R projects as the Division CMIC Battalion. To date, there
have been
5 KIAs and 58 WIAs. One soldier, (CPL Platero) has been at
BAMC in
Texas recovering from a severe leg injury since October 2006
and is
expected to remain there another year. The recently retired
MOD
(Romero) was seeking assistance from DoD in establishing a
long-term
medical agreement which would support OIF WIA. SOUTHCOM
staff is
researching/coordinating this issue with OSD. The GOES has
pledged
to remain in Iraq as long as needed; Salvadoran counterparts
insist
that the US stood by them during their difficult civil war
(1980-1992),
and that they will stand with us. Salvadoran troops have
performed
admirably for the last four years. Their performance has
been recognized
at various levels, to include six soldiers being awarded the
Bronze Star
by former SECDEF Rumsfeld for saving the life of Najaf's
Coalition
Provisional Authority Provincial Coordinator and five other
American
Government Officials. In May 2007, President Saca made an
unannounced
visit to Iraq and personally expressed his gratitude and
pride for
their tremendous contributions to the reconstruction of Iraq.
Last
month (Dec 07), a delegation consisting of then MOD General
Romero
(now retired), and then CHOD General Molina (new MOD), and
three
legislators visited the contingent and met with General
Petraeus,

expressing once again El Salvador's commitment to stay the course.

¶7. (C) Salvadoran soldiers were intimately involved in the training and equipping of the Iraqi Civil Defense Forces in Najaf, Al Hillah, and Al Kut. The national press has positively portrayed the real impact of ESAF efforts and the gratitude of Iraqi provincial leaders. Although public opposition to Salvadoran involvement in Iraq runs as high as 70 percent, on 21 Dec the Legislative Assembly voted (46-31) in favor of extending Salvadoran Troop deployments through 30 Jun 2009 avoiding a vote next Dec 2008, just before elections in Jan of 2009.

Peacekeeping and International Agreements

¶8. (SBU) The GOES is interested in peacekeeping opportunities, although the commitment in Iraq and current ESAF budget constraints make such new deployments of troops unlikely for the time being. The UN has certified ESAF as competent for full participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations. Last month (Dec 07) the former MOD, CHOD, and three legislators went to the UN in an exploratory visit seeking a clear definition as to the type of required units and potential mission participation. Since 2005 the USG has released funding for equipment and training the ESAF to take part in the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) in support of a long-term desire of the Conference of Central American Armed Forces (CFAC) to deploy a combined peacekeeping unit from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. El Salvador is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court, but signed and ratified Article 98 provisions to the Rome Statue with the U.S. in 2004. In late 2006 the legislature approved a 505 Agreement for U.S.-provided assistance; the Assembly has also approved an agreement for the protection of classified military information and the DoD/DoS preferred global format Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

Counternarcotics and Counterterrorism Issues

¶9. (C) The Salvadoran government is a valuable partner in the war on drugs. El Salvador is a transit country for narcotics, mainly cocaine and heroin. El Salvador is host to Central America,s only Cooperative Security Location (CSL), as well as to Latin America,s International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which provides law enforcement training to personnel from El Salvador and the region. The CSL agreement expires 23 Aug 2010. The CT assesses that it is best to renew the agreements now, with the current government, rather than

after the 2009
elections. Additionally, it should be negotiated as soon as
possible,
in order to avoid becoming a political campaign issue in
¶2008. OSD and
DoS are currently working on a draft agreement. President
Saca has
indicated he is receptive to the idea of expanding
authorities beyond
the current CN detection and monitoring missions.
U.S.-funded training
and equipment have contributed significantly to improvements
in the
National Civilian Police (PNC) Counternarcotics Division. El
Salvador's
geographic position makes it vulnerable to those trafficking
drugs, drug
proceeds (in the form of bulk currency shipments), people,
and
guns to or from the United States. JIATF-South, with its
ability to provide
Salvadoran authorities with real-time intelligence, is a
great asset;
however, the ESAF need additional resources to help us take
full advantage
of JIATF,s capabilities.
Glazer